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SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/MAG AND INL; PARIS PASS TO DEA

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TAGS: [SNAR](#) [SOCI](#) [PGOV](#) [MO](#)
SUBJECT: GOM COUNTER-DRUG EFFORTS IN CHEFCHAOUAN HAVE
NEGATIVE EFFECT ON LOCAL ELECTIONS

Classified By: POLCOUNS Craig Karp for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: Moroccan efforts to eradicate cannabis cultivation in the northern part of the country have been successful enough to prompt some voters to boycott the coming local elections. In the northern province of Chefchouan, heart of Morocco's cannabis producing region, various party candidates in the June 12 municipal elections told Poloff they expected a weak voter turnout in protest against the increased eradication efforts. Ministry of Interior (MOI) officials halted the eradication for one month to avoid interference with election campaigns. The Government of Morocco (GOM) launched a \$US 110.5 million initiative in May to provide alternative sources of income for cannabis farmers and is considering an amnesty program. Authorities already achieved 20 percent of their 2009 goal of reducing cannabis cultivation areas by 10,000 hectares (ha). They invited the USG to send observers when their eradication efforts restart in late June. End Summary.

Cannabis Crackdown Angers Local Cannabis Farmers

12. (C) Abdelhamid Iddez is a Socialist Union of Popular Forces (USFP) municipal candidate for the rural village of Beni derkel who opined in a meeting with Poloff June 5 that citizens living in the rural areas of Chefchouan are angry and fed up with government officials for burning and destroying cannabis crops during a recent GOM eradication campaign. According to Iddez, this crackdown on drugs came at the wrong time. People will not participate in the upcoming June 12 elections as a way to express their disapproval with the government authorities.

13. (C) Justice and Development Party (PJD) candidate Abdelaziz Stitou is a municipal candidate in the rural village of Fifi, also located in the Province of Chefchaouen. Stitou told Poloff that people in his community were shocked when GOM authorities recently appeared in April informing local farmers that they were to immediately cease all cultivation of cannabis crops. According to Stitou, authorities took away their only means of financial support without providing any type of substitute.

14. (C) Stitou explained that rural Moroccan residents normally have a higher than the national average rate of participation in elections; however, due to the recent GOM drug crackdown, he predicts a lower than average participation rate in June 12 local elections.

MOI Serious About Counter-Drug Efforts

¶15. (SBU) MOI Assistant Director of Migration and Border Security Nouredine Moujahid confirmed to Poloff on June 8 that the GOM is sensitive to the impact that the cannabis eradication campaign may have on local elections and as a result, temporarily suspended operations in May. Officials will reconvene efforts in late June after the elections.

¶16. (SBU) Moujahid commented that while local residents in drug producing areas may be upset with eradication efforts, GOM authorities have been telling them to stop growing cannabis since 2003. "Continuing to cultivate the illegal drug is a gamble for local farmers, we are serious about our eradication efforts, and violators will be caught and prosecuted", Moujahid said. Although the primary eradication season takes place between May and July each year, authorities have already destroyed 2,010 ha of cannabis in the northern region over the past four months, representing 20 percent of their total eradication goal for 2009. Plans call for cannabis cultivation areas to decrease below 50,000 ha this year and down to 12,000 ha by the year 2012.

¶17. (U) Last month, GOM authorities initiated a multi-government agency development program targeting the provinces of Al Hoceima, Tetouan, Taounate, Larache and Chefchaouen. This 895 million dirham (\$US 110.5 million) initiative will be implemented over the next two years and has four main components: 1) developing alternative sources of income to replace cannabis cultivation, 2) infrastructure development 3) social development, and 4) forest reclamation /environmental protection.

¶18. (C) According to Moujahid, the GOM is currently discussing an amnesty program for all cannabis farmers who

have recently fled their homes in fear of being arrested for their illicit cultivation activities. Moujahid explained that this GOM program will allow former cannabis growers to start a new life and earn a living growing legitimate, alternative crops such as olives and fruit trees. This new effort, not yet officially announced, will hopefully be implemented later this year.

¶19. (SBU) Moujahid offered to organize a cannabis eradication trip for a team of interested USG officials at the end of June, and after the local elections. He said that the GOM welcomes USG support and assistance, especially in the form of vehicles, equipment, and training.

¶10. (SBU) Comment: The unsolicited comments by angry residents in cannabis producing regions were expressed to an unescorted Poloff and LES. They appear to confirm that the GOM is serious about its cannabis eradication efforts and the effects are being felt by small growers. Any assistance the USG can provide the GOM in furthering their eradication efforts would be appreciated by the GOM and help build upon a relationship of trust and engagement. End Comment.

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